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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DRL/MGLA (L.SICADE) AND EUR/CE (Y.SAINT-ANDRE)

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SUBJECT: SWISS NOT SURPRISED, BUT REGRET USG POSITION ON
UNHRC

REF: STATE 61034

Classified By: Poloff Chris Buck; reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

USG AND THE UNHRC

¶1. (C) Poloff delivered reftel message June 18 to Ralf Heckner, Head of the MFA's Human Rights Policy Section. In an expansive and collegial manner, Heckner responded that the USG's decision no longer to participate in UNHRC sessions or activities did not come as a surprise, as it was apparent last fall that the USG was shifting its efforts to the UN Third Committee. He regretted the decision, saying "we need the USG in Geneva using all tools" to promote human rights. He commented that, "unfortunately, the United States and Switzerland are shifting our resources (for promoting human rights within UN forums) in two different directions." While acknowledging USG disappointments with the UNHRC, and conceding that "challenges" remain for the UNHRC to fulfill Swiss expectations, Heckner defended the UNHRC as a "success" in general terms, saying this remains the view of the Swiss government. Poloff reiterated abiding USG concerns and disappointments with the UNHRC, per reftel.

Durban Review Conference

¶2. (C) Heckner used the occasion of the meeting with poloff to report that the Swiss Federal Council (Executive Cabinet) has decided that Switzerland will continue to participate in planning for the Durban Review Conference in 2009, but on condition that the review conference adhere strictly to assessing implementation of commitments made at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, and does not seek to negotiate new norms or to focus on a single region. Heckner said that he believes that the "balanced approach" Switzerland plans to take is "quite close to what the USG would hope for." He observed that involving civil society (NGOs) in the review conference in a positive way presents challenges, and that the GOS already had begun to engage NGOs with this in mind. Heckner remarked that "everyone has a burden in getting a proper outcome" out of the review conference, and added that Switzerland will be a member of a drafting committee that will develop a review paper over the summer.
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